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# Presidents of Cedarville University: Brief Biographies

Cedarville University

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**Cedarville University Archives**  
*CUA Guide #23*

**Presidents of Cedarville University**  
**Brief Biographies**  
*Prepared 2003*  
*Revised October 2015*

**David McKinney**  
**1894-1915**

The Rev. Doctor David McKinney was born in Philadelphia in 1860. He was educated in the Philadelphia public schools, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He also was awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree from Wittenberg College in 1895. The General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church elected him first president of Cedarville College in 1894. While president, he continued to serve his congregation in Cincinnati and commuted by train to Cedarville twice weekly to provide leadership in the development of a fledgling institution. Dr. McKinney was known for his energy and determination to see the College well established. He knew every student personally and was known as an inspiring speaker and a man of great intellectual ability. After resigning from the presidency in June of 1915, Dr. McKinney continued as President Emeritus and Trustee until his death in 1934. McKinney Hall, a dormitory constructed in 1999, was named in honor of Dr. McKinney.

**Wilbert Renwick McChesney**  
**1915-1940**

Dr. Wilbert McChesney, born in Pennsylvania in 1871, attended Greensburg Academy and graduated from Franklin College in 1892. Following his graduation, he taught Latin and History at Franklin for two years and in 1894 became the first professor at Cedarville College when the doors officially opened for classes. He received his Masters and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Franklin College and a Doctor of Divinity from Tarkio College. Dr. McChesney served at Cedarville, not only as a faculty member, but also as Secretary of the Faculty, Vice President, and Dean. In 1915, upon the retirement of Dr. David McKinney, Dr. McChesney was named the second president of Cedarville. For a period of time, the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary was also located at Cedarville, and Dr. McChesney served the Seminary as professor of New Testament literature and later as professor of systematic and pastoral theology. Dr. McChesney commanded the respect of his denomination and of his community. In addition to his ministry at Cedarville, he served seven terms in the Ohio Legislature. He led the College during very difficult days during World War I and the Depression. Even so, one historian described those years at the College as the “golden years.” As Dr. McChesney approached 70 years of age, the pressures of the office of president and the desire for a younger man to assume the responsibilities of the administration led him to submit his resignation on June 1, 1939. It became effective in 1940 upon the appointment of Walter Kilpatrick as the third president of Cedarville. When an alumnus of the class of 1908 was asked his opinion of Dr. McChesney, he immediately responded, “He was the finest man ever connected with Cedarville College.” At the completion of his 25 years as president, Dr. McChesney had served Cedarville College for 46

years. McChesney Hall, a dormitory constructed in 1999, was named in honor of Dr. McChesney.

### **Walter Smith Kilpatrick**

#### **1940-1943**

The Rev. Walter Smith Kilpatrick was selected by the Board of Trustees in 1940 to replace Dr. McChesney. Rev. Kirkpatrick had graduated from Cedarville College in 1934 with honors. He studied for the ministry at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh where he again graduated with honors and received an award to study in England. Following that opportunity, he spent a semester at the University of Basil in Switzerland. In addition, he received a Master of Arts degree from the University of Pittsburgh and completed his residency for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at Pittsburgh. Kilpatrick was inaugurated on October 4, 1940, a gala occasion which included an address at the inaugural dinner by the governor of Ohio, John W. Bricker. Kilpatrick's brief tenure as president was plagued by growing financial difficulties, made more difficult by the impact of World War II. In October, 1942, Kilpatrick asked for a leave of absence to serve overseas with the European Student Relief Fund, leaving the operation of the College in the hands of the Business Manager, Mr. Ira Vayhinger, who would serve as Acting President. Kilpatrick departed the College in early 1943, but, because of some personal difficulties, he did not complete the overseas assignment, and he also resigned as President in February of 1943.

### **Ira D. Vayhinger**

#### **1943-1950**

Following the sudden resignation of the third president, Walter Kilpatrick, in 1943, the Board of Trustees selected Ira Vayhinger as the College's fourth president. Mr Vayhinger had graduated from Evansville College in 1910, and had done graduate work at Oberlin Theological Seminary from 1910-1911. He had served as General Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1911-1922. From 1923 -1941, he had been a church finance consultant and campaign director, coming to Cedarville College in 1941 to become the Finance Director and Business Manager. It was Mr. Vayhinger's task to attempt to guide the College through the challenging years of World War II, when it was a struggle to maintain enrollments and financial stability. However, despite attempts to raise additional funds and to expand enrollment, the deepening financial crisis led to the resignation of Mr. Vayhinger in 1950.

### **E. H. Miller**

#### **1950-1953**

Following the resignation of Ira Vayhinger as President, the Business Manager of the College, Mr. E. H. Miller was appointed as President. It was while Mr. Miller was President, that Cedarville, in order to sustain the viability of the College, continued to actively seek a merger with another institution or to invite the assumption of operations by other church denominations. Without such actions, it appeared that the College would be forced to close at the end of the 1952/53 academic year. It was during early 1953 that the Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland, looking for larger quarters for its growing program, made an offer to merge with Cedarville College and assume control not only of the charter and campus of the College, but also of its growing debt. Following the unanimous vote of both Boards of Trustees to implement the

merger, the transfer was completed on April 4, 1953. At that point E. H. Miller's tenure as president ended.

### **Leonard Webster**

#### **1953-1954**

Dr. Leonard Webster, the Dean of the Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland, was selected as President of the Institute in 1953. Thus, when the merger with Cedarville College was completed, he became the new president of the College. Dr. Webster was soon thrust into managing the move from Cleveland to Cedarville, assuring a student body for the Fall of 1954, and finding a faculty for the College to complement the faculty of the Baptist Bible Institute. In his brief tenure as president, Dr. Webster represented the College at the national and State of Ohio conferences of the Regular Baptist Churches to promote the College and to raise the necessary funds to keep it solvent. The stresses of this transition and of a developing leadership crisis led to the resignation of Dr. Webster in June of 1954.

### **James T. Jeremiah**

#### **1954-1978**

Dr. James T. Jeremiah, born in New York in 1914, graduated from Baptist Bible Seminary in Johnson City, New York, in 1936. Dr. Jeremiah assumed his first pastorate in Panama, New York, followed by a move to the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Toledo, Ohio, in 1938. In 1940, he began his service as the pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio. It was while serving in Dayton that Dr. Jeremiah became aware of the plight of Cedarville College in Cedarville, Ohio, whose trustees in 1953 were looking for a merger with another institution or another group to assume the responsibility for the College, given it was on the verge of closing. At the same time, the Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland was searching for another property to which they could move to ease crowdedness and to expand to a four-year college. Dr. Jeremiah's service on the Board of Trustees of the Baptist Bible Institute and his awareness of the availability of the Cedarville College campus led him to be instrumental in the decision of Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland to merge with Cedarville College, taking over an institution with declining enrollments and increasing debt.

Though reluctant to leave the church ministry he loved, Dr. Jeremiah was finally persuaded to take over the leadership of Cedarville College, now under Baptist direction after its 66 years under the Presbyterians. Under Dr. Jeremiah's servant leadership, the College began the transformation from a struggling school to an accredited institution of higher learning respected for its graduates, programs, faculty, and facilities. College enrollment steadily increased during Dr. Jeremiah's tenure, reaching more than 1200 by the mid-1970's. This transformation of the institution also included the expansion and development of the campus with major new facilities being constructed and additional land being purchased for future growth.

During his tenure as the President of Cedarville, Dr. Jeremiah earned an undergraduate degree in history from Central State University in 1961, a Master of Arts degree from Winona Lake School of Theology in 1968, and he was awarded the honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Cedarville College in 1974. Dr. Paul Dixon, Cedarville's eighth president, said of Dr. Jeremiah at the time of his death in 2000, "Dr. Jeremiah has been 'Mr. Cedarville' for the past 47 years. He provided the vision and energy to transform a struggling college into an institution of higher learning that

attracts some of the brightest and most committed Christian young people in America.” Dr. Jeremiah stepped down as president in 1978, and assumed the role of Chancellor, which he held until his death in August, 2000. The Jeremiah Chapel in the Dixon Ministry Center is named in honor of Dr. James T. Jeremiah.

**Paul H. Dixon**  
**1978-2003**

Dr. Paul H. Dixon became the eighth president of Cedarville College in 1978. A graduate of Tennessee Temple University and Temple Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Dixon spent 14 years as an evangelist before becoming president. In 1986, while president, he earned his doctorate in higher education from the University of Cincinnati. He also holds an honorary doctor of divinity degree from his alma mater, and the honorary doctor of laws degree from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

A glance at the 25 years of Dr. Dixon’s presidency reveals great achievements for the Cedarville University. But Dr. Dixon would be the first to say that the only explanation for Cedarville is God. The success of the University may be due in part to Dixon’s God-given ability to balance stability and change. Without fail, Dixon has kept the University in step with its credo — “for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” — and its mission — “to provide an education consistent with biblical truth.” Faculty and staff have named his strong emphasis on chapel and his challenging sermons as two of the most significant characteristics of his presidency. His evident, passionate desire for students to take part in the Great Commission never waned. Under Dr. Dixon’s leadership, daily required chapel continued to be a priority on campus.

Yet the very opposite of stability — change — has been another building block of Dr. Dixon’s tenure. With a strong vision and a strategic plan in hand before he even began his job, Dixon has led the University into tremendous growth. In his 25 years, \$100 million in facilities have been built on a campus that has expanded from 180 acres to 400. Cedarville attained university status in 2000 and now offers more than 100 programs, including graduate degrees. Enrollment has blossomed from 1,185 students in 1978 to more than 3,000, and the faculty has grown from 60 to 203. As well, the University’s focus on technology positioned it as a leader in the digital age.

At the conclusion of his 25 years as President, Dr. Dixon has certainly modeled the life verse which he and his wife, Pat, chose: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.” Psalm 37:23. In May 2003, Dr. Dixon became the Chancellor of the University. The Dixon Ministry Center, opened in 1996, was named in honor of Paul and Pat Dixon.

**William E. Brown**  
**2003-2013**

The Cedarville University board of trustees elected Dr. William E. Brown as its ninth president in May 2002. Dr. Brown, the former president of William Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee, assumed his new role in the spring of 2003. He was at Bryan for 17 years in various capacities and served as president from 1992-2003.

Dr. Brown earned his undergraduate degree at the University of South Florida, and subsequently earned a Master of Theology degree and a Ph.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary. He joined the Bryan faculty in 1984 as an assistant professor for Biblical studies. He was named Bryan's academic vice president and provost in 1988 and then named president in 1992. The Cedarville University Board of Trustees selection of Dr. Brown followed a rigorous, international search for Dr. Dixon's successor. Upon being selected as the President of Cedarville University, Dr. Brown said: "Leaving our beloved Bryan College is the most difficult decision we have ever made. If it were not for the belief that God has a significant future for us at Cedarville University we would never have considered the presidency of this great institution. Lynne, April, Alex and I look forward to the years ahead and being a part of the exciting and unique Christian worldview education at Cedarville." Dr. Dixon shared about William Brown: "I am excited about the board's choice. Bill Brown brings so many fine qualities to our Cedarville family. He's exceptionally well-prepared to lead Cedarville University in its mission of providing an education consistent with biblical truth. His scholarship, administrative experience, and well-deserved reputation will help the University further its vision. Dr. Brown has a genuine heart for God and an intense love for university students. He has a strong commitment to assist Christians in developing their worldview." Dr. Brown is a prolific author. He has written three books, ***Making Sense of Your Faith***, published by Victor Books; ***Where Have All the Dreamers Gone?: Observations from a Biblical Worldview***, published by Bryan College Press; and ***Making Sense of Your World*** (with Gary Phillips), jointly published by Moody Press and Sheffield Press. Additionally, Dr. Brown has authored more than a hundred articles for journals, magazines (***Readers Digest*** and ***Christianity Today***), newspapers, and encyclopedias. He is a regular columnist for the national magazine, ***World***. His memberships include the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, and the Evangelical Theological Society.

### **Thomas White 2013-**

Thomas White became the 10th president of Cedarville University on July 1, 2013. Serving in a variety of leadership roles and responsibilities, White came to the position with more than a decade of administrative, teaching, and research experience combined with strong leadership and a pastoral heart for ministry.

As the son and grandson of Baptist ministers, White grew up with a firm spiritual foundation and was saved in September 1993. He graduated from Anderson University in 1997 with a degree in English, from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2001 with a Master of Divinity degree and in 2005 with a Ph.D. in systematic theology. Throughout seminary, White combined theological depth with evangelistic passion. While studying with astute theologians, he put the Gospel into action by participating in missions and itinerate preaching. In addition, White served as Director of Student Life at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina. In July 2004, White was called to serve at Southwestern Seminary in Texas as Director of Leadership Development. In June 2006, he was promoted and served until June 2013 as Vice President for Student Services and Communications. During his tenure, he enjoyed the challenge of identifying problems, evaluating people, finding the right solution to move forward while minimizing harm, and casting a clear vision while building a successful team.

White also served as Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern Seminary. In his faculty role, he taught in the Oxford University study program and was a visiting professor, along with his wife, Joy, at Word of Life Bible Institute in New York. At Southwestern, he developed online graduate-level classes; taught master's and doctoral courses in subjects including systematic theology, public relations for the local church, and advanced expository preaching; and revamped the seminary's evangelism program.

White has been active in research, writing, and contributing to the academy. Early in his career, he received an academic excellence award and a study grant, which led to his publishing a three-volume series on James Madison Pendleton. He co-authored ***Franchising McChurch: Feeding Our Obsession with Easy Christianity*** in 2009 and served as editor of ***First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty, Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches***, and ***Upon This Rock***. White has contributed to other books, written numerous articles, and is active in social media through Facebook, Twitter, and his blog.

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